

A Clash of Paradigms: Hidden Paradigms Within Entrepreneurship Pedagogy

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Abstract: As the literature around entrepreneurship pedagogy matures and the number of entrepreneurship programmes continue to flourish, we see a clash of paradigms that hide assumptions about what success is and how success is internalised as an internal cognitive schema. This has implications for the way entrepreneurship is viewed by stakeholders, how behaviour success is measured and how it is taught to aspiring students. The goal of this paper is to examine two contradicting paradigms we propose underlie much of existing entrepreneurship pedagogy. Based on existing literature, this paper develops and draws on two main extreme alternative entrepreneurship approaches that is found in literature: The individualistic competitive approach (i.e. often populated by Individuals with problematic narcissistic tendencies) versus the collectivist team-based approach (i.e. embedding extensive psychological safety and a collectivist logic). The previous approach in some of the literature, have been proposed to give superior outcomes in terms of economic measures. More recent research however questions this approach and its outcomes. Among others, the dependent variables on which the more individualistic research orients do not account for the wider set of value(s) that mission-driven and sustainable entrepreneurship build. As such, the two approaches represent different paradigms of entrepreneurship and what entrepreneurship is about. The paper uses existing literature and document analysis of the entrepreneurship programme descriptions at the master level across Europe, Asia and the US. We classify the dominance of the different approaches across programmes and geographies using online available descriptions from the university's sites. As such, we develop insights into the underlying values and assumptions on which the programmes are based and the consistency of their learning outcomes, given their orientation. The findings illustrate that both paradigms are found in most entrepreneurship programmes, but with different emphasis, while at the same time addressing the difficulties of integrating the two paradigms in the same educational programmes.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, University, Innovation, Higher Education, Critical Pedagogy, Curriculum Analysis

1. Introduction

Beliefs in entrepreneurial success has since the start of 2025 been thrust upon global politics as Elon Musk entered a central role in the American Presidency. As a result, the logic of entrepreneurship is heavily impacting societal decisions far beyond Silicon Valley. The underlying logic of the governing bodies of the US will be the centre of the research that will be presented below. We consider two alternative divergent paradigms of entrepreneurship: the individual versus the collective, and the values that underpin entrepreneurial activity (Neck & Greene, 2011; Fayolle, 2013). These logics carry epistemological and pedagogical consequences that shape how entrepreneurship is taught, what behaviours are valorised, and how aspiring entrepreneurs internalize success.

Further, in a world where there is need for sustainable oriented businesses, the focus on the need for alternative approaches and conceptualizations and understanding of value creation is essential. Under an individualistic and economic notion of entrepreneurship this is difficult to achieve.

While entrepreneurial activity traditionally did not take place in educational institutions, this has changed since the 2000s, where entrepreneurship has become a future skill and part of university curriculum globally. To study the underlying paradigms of entrepreneurship and their dominance, we therefore use the curricula of entrepreneurship education as a starting point. We look at the most innovative universities globally based on the WURI2024 (Global Top 300 Innovative Universities) ranking to map how the logics are expressed and the degree to which they dominate. Our aim is to develop an understanding of the degree to which the logics compete and are distinct or take a more integrated form. As a starting point for our research, we ask the following research question: How are different entrepreneurship paradigms and their resulting logics integrated into entrepreneurship programmes across universities and geographies?

By interrogating these paradigms and their interlinked logics and analysing how they manifest across educational programmes, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the normative and ideological assumptions

embedded within entrepreneurship education. It also offers insight into how these paradigms shape learning outcomes and the entrepreneurial identities students come to adopt.

2. Theory

2.1 Competing Paradigms: Individualism Versus Collectivism in Entrepreneurial Logic

Two broad paradigms can be identified in the entrepreneurship literature. The first, an individualistic-competitive paradigm, aligns with neoliberal and market-driven logics of entrepreneurial action (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Berglund & Verduijn, 2018). This paradigm emphasizes personal ambition, competitive drive, risk-taking, and the cultivation of a strong entrepreneurial identity—traits that align with what has been described as a “heroic” or “lone wolf” model of entrepreneurship (Anderson & Warren, 2011). Such portrayals often neglect the social, relational, and contextual dimensions of entrepreneurship, instead privileging traits commonly associated with charismatic or even narcissistic individuals (Mathieu & St-Jean, 2013; Baldegger & Gast, 2016). Entrepreneurial success, in this paradigm, is typically measured through economic outcomes such as venture growth, financial performance, and scalability (Shepherd et al., 2019).

In contrast, we highlight a second paradigm, which can be termed collectivist-collaborative, that emphasizes relational embeddedness, team-based learning, psychological safety, and shared value creation (Johannisson, 2011; Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Drawing on pedagogies of collaboration and experiential learning, this paradigm aligns with humanistic and constructivist educational philosophies (Gibb, 2002; Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006). In this paradigm entrepreneurship is conceived as a process that emerges within networks and communities, oriented toward mutual benefit, social innovation, and sustainability (Neck et al., 2014; Jones & Matlay, 2011). This paradigm places greater emphasis on inclusivity, reflexivity, and mission-driven value creation, and is thus more attuned to emerging forms of sustainable and social entrepreneurship (Chell, 2007; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011).

2.2 Problematic Consequences of Paradigmatic Tensions

While both paradigms offer legitimate perspectives, their coexistence can create problematic tensions—both pedagogically and epistemologically. The individualistic-competitive paradigm can foster an exclusionary view of entrepreneurship that marginalizes those who do not conform to dominant entrepreneurial archetypes (Bruni et al., 2004; Essers & Benschop, 2007). Often utilising instructional approaches that emphasize competition, performance metrics, and real-world pressure simulations such as pitch competitions, business plan contests, and accelerator-style programming (Hägg & Gabrielsson, 2020). Moreover, it may cultivate environments of psychological insecurity and excessive performance pressure among students, reinforcing values that reward competition over collaboration (Jones et al., 2012).

On the other hand, the collectivist-collaborative paradigm, offers a more inclusive and socially responsive view, focussing on dialogue, critical reflection, peer learning, and affective engagement—components that support the development of psychological safety and collective efficacy (Rideout & Gray, 2013; Jones, Matlay, & Maritz, 2012). This may be undervalued in institutional settings that prioritize short-term measurable outcomes and economic impact, thus leading to potential dissonance between pedagogical intent and institutional reward structures (Neck & Corbett, 2018; Rideout & Gray, 2013).

While both paradigms are often present across entrepreneurship programmes, their coexistence often produces tensions that are rarely acknowledged explicitly in curricula (Blenker et al., 2012). The simultaneous presence of both paradigms in educational programmes—often without explicit articulation—can result in curricular incoherence, mixed messages, and confusion for students (Blenker et al., 2012). Instructors may promote psychological safety in one module, while subjecting students to zero-sum competition in another, inadvertently undermining the values they intend to foster. Without a critical interrogation of the paradigmatic foundations of entrepreneurship education, such contradictions remain unresolved and potentially damaging to student learning and identity development.

2.3 Internalization of Entrepreneurial Success

A key concern that arises from these paradigmatic tensions is how students internalize the notion of success. Under the individualistic paradigm, success is narrowly defined through external, often financial metrics, potentially leading to internalized pressure, self-comparison, and exclusionary conceptions of legitimacy (Essers

& Benschop, 2007; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004). The collectivist paradigm, in contrast, promotes a broader and more inclusive understanding of success, integrating personal growth, social contribution, and ethical responsibility. We know that different cultures view each paradigm differently (Thetsane, Meyer, & Chambwe, 2024), and as the world becomes more globalised the institutionalization of entrepreneurship education often reinforces dominant colonial logics that privilege measurable economic outcomes, even when alternative values are espoused rhetorically (Omodan, Manquma & Mafunda, 2024; Hytti & Heinonen, 2013).

2.4 The Hidden Nature of Paradigms and Educator Blind Spots

A central challenge in addressing these paradigms is their often implicit and taken-for-granted nature. Paradigms act as lenses through which educators interpret entrepreneurship and legitimate certain forms of knowledge, behaviour, and success while rendering others invisible (Kuhn, 1970; Blenker et al., 2012). Because these paradigms are rarely made explicit in course design or institutional documentation, educators may unknowingly reproduce organisational logics without critical reflection. For example, educators trained within neoliberal academic systems may instinctively design learning environments that reward individual performance, competition, and pitch-based assessments, believing these to be pedagogically neutral or universally applicable (Berglund & Verduijn, 2018; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

This uncritical reproduction of paradigms may stem from a lack of engagement with alternative conceptions of entrepreneurship or insufficient pedagogical training (Fayolle, 2013). If educators do not reflect on their own assumptions—about what entrepreneurship is, what counts as success, and how entrepreneurial capability should be developed—they risk engaging in what Bourdieu (1977) describes as *doxa*: the unquestioned, habitual enactment of dominant social norms.

2.5 Implications for Critical Pedagogy and Programme Design

Addressing these hidden paradigms requires a move toward critical entrepreneurship pedagogy—a form of teaching that foregrounds reflexivity, acknowledges the normative foundations of curricula, and invites pluralistic understandings of entrepreneurial practice (Berglund & Verduijn, 2018). This entails creating space for both students and educators to interrogate the values embedded in entrepreneurship education, recognize alternative paradigms, and understand the implications of privileging one over another. Without this critical engagement, educators may inadvertently reinforce narrow, hegemonic models of entrepreneurship that do not reflect the complex, dynamic, and socially embedded nature of entrepreneurial life (Johannisson, 2011; Chell, 2007).

3. Methods

To study expressions of the paradigms of entrepreneurship we use document analysis using the WURI Ranking 2024 of Global Top 300 Innovative Universities. In particular, we searched for Master of entrepreneurship programmes at the listed universities on this list in the US, Europe and Asia. While we could have analysed the top 30 universities on the selected ranking, this would have been largely dominated by US universities. As we assume that the national and regional culture of the universities matter, we chose to make sure that we had some variation on this dimension. As such, while the US is known for its individualistic nature and Asian countries more collectivistic (Hofstede, 2001), we rather aim to include the top 10 US, 10 Asian and 10 European, to maximize variation on the individualistic-collectivistic dimension.

3.1 Data Collection

For each of the universities we chose their most developed educational programmes solely dedicated to entrepreneurship at the master level (Table 1). We review and analyse the description and the choice of learning outcomes and pedagogy. We only include programmes where descriptions are available online. For each programme a description was developed to capture the orientation of the programme. The identification of each programme was done by Googling in an In Private window the university name and “master of entrepreneurship program”. The top listed non sponsored programme was picked from each university. The focus was on Master of Science or MBA programmes. To the degree that programmes including additional specifications such as “Master in Sustainable entrepreneurship” was the main result, this course was selected. We only studied the content of the required courses and did not take into consideration electives unless there were electives that were highly focused on the collective notion of entrepreneurship. In terms of courses, we

focused on the main entrepreneurship course in each of the programmes and looked for the degree to which the programmes included courses that focused on either of the two logics.

Table 1: Overview of programmes included

| Nr | WURI Rank 2024 | University | Location | Programme |
|----|----------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Minerva University | USA | No dedicated programme located |
| 2 | 2 | Arizona State University | USA | MSc |
| 3 | 3 | MIT | USA | MBA |
| 4 | 4 | University of Pennsylvania | USA | MSc |
| 5 | 4 | University of Pennsylvania | USA | BS |
| 6 | 5 | Stanford University | USA | No dedicated programme located |
| 7 | 6 | Ecole 42 | Europe - France | No dedicated programme located |
| 8 | 7 | Aalto University | Europe - Finland | MSc |
| 9 | 8 | Hanze University of Applied Sciences | Europe - Netherland | No dedicated programme located |
| 10 | 9 | University of California, Berkeley | USA | MBA |
| 11 | 10 | California Institute of Technology (Caltech) | USA | No dedicated programme located |
| 12 | 11 | Princeton University | USA | No degree; Only courses |
| 13 | 12 | Harvard University | USA | MBA |
| 14 | 13 | Incheon National University | Asia -South-Korea | No dedicated programme located |
| 15 | 16 | Seoul National University | Asia -South-Korea | No dedicated programme located |
| 16 | 17 | National University of Singapore | Asia - Singapore | MSc |
| 17 | 18 | Abdullah Gul University | Asia- Turkey (also considered Europe) | No dedicated programme located |
| 18 | 19 | Tsinghua University | Asia - China | Certificate Master |
| 19 | 20 | Deggendorf Institute of Technology | Europe - Germany | MBA |
| 20 | 21 | University of Oxford | Europe - UK | No dedicated programme located |
| 21 | 22 | University of Cambridge | Europe - UK | MSc |
| 22 | 27 | Hankuk University of Foreign Studies | Asia - South-Korea | No dedicated programme located |
| 23 | 29 | Franklin University Switzerland | Europe -Switzerland | No dedicated programme located |
| 24 | 33 | Peking University | Asia - China | Organize around research centre |
| 25 | 34 | University of Twente | Europe - Netherlands | MSc |
| 26 | 37 | University College London | Europe - UK | MSc |
| 27 | 40 | Beijing Normal University | Asia - China | No dedicated programme located |
| 28 | 42 | Tra Vinh University | Asia - Vietnam | No dedicated programme located |
| 29 | 43 | Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University for Women [IGDTUW] | Asia - India | No dedicated programme located |
| 30 | 49 | Kyoto University | Asia - Japan | No dedicated programme located |

3.2 Analysis

We applied a framework where we looked for the traits in programme descriptions within the following areas: The general descriptions, the pedagogy, the learning outcomes and the course portfolio. The analysis was primarily done by the second and last author with the first authors scrutinizing the analytical process and content. The two coders checked each other's process and conclusions to ensure validity of the work. To ensure the validity of the research, we have described our research approach in depth above. As we use openly

accessible data, the study can be easily replicated. Also, the categorization of keywords identified are listed in the findings table. In terms of transferability, the analysis was done with a global scope using data from a broad set of different cultures. This was done to increase the usability of the results across contexts.

4. Findings

Both paradigms were found in the studied programmes. While the individualistic competitive paradigm was the dominant one, the collectivist paradigm was also present in some of the identified university programmes. As a first insight we identified a core set of subsidiary concepts that could be linked to the different paradigms, as illustrated in Table 2. The findings relative to each of the paradigms of entrepreneurship is described more in detail below.

Table 2: Overview of relevant words used to tag the different paradigms.

| Paradigm of Entrepreneurship | Individualistic - Competitive | Collectivistic - Collaborative |
|---|--|---|
| Orientation | Profitable and competitive ventures | Social and sustainable entrepreneurship |
| Description – selected words | Venture creation, You, the firm, team, design thinking, ideation, best practices, competition, practical | Holistic approach to entrepreneurship, ecosystem, systemic, critical, entrepreneurial mindset, soft entrepreneurial skills, community |
| Pedagogy | Lectures, reports, class participation, presentations. theory and practice | Group work, reflection, process |
| Course portfolio that sets distinct focus | Economics, negotiations, traditional marketing, budgeting | Social Innovation; Sustainable Development Goals as Business Opportunities; Product Sustainability |

4.1 The Logics of the Individualistic – Competitive

Most of the top ranked universities followed the logic of the individualistic competitive paradigm, especially for the US, but also for Asian universities. The descriptions of learning outcomes are functional – focusing on learning skills that enable entrepreneurship, with limited critical perspective or orientation. An example of this is The University of Cambridge where the learning objectives are to “Learn to identify ideas for entrepreneurial ventures and how to evaluate their potential for success. Turn your ideas into a set of hypotheses and use tried-and-tested techniques to test your assumptions. Delve deep into the science of persuasion and identify the rational, social and emotional levers you can use to gain the support of critical audiences, like innovators, early adopters, co-innovators and distribution partners.” (University of Cambridge). Thus, the main orientations of these programmes are towards the entrepreneur and the economic outcomes of business models.

While some of the individualistic programmes point to social entrepreneurship, the words related to a more collectivist paradigm in these programmes appear to be used as a signally mechanism to students that they ‘care’ about social issues, rather than really utilising a collectivist logic. This is evident in the lack of collectivist pedagogy and critical reflection in these programmes. In some of the programmes even social entrepreneurship is focussed on generating profits: “The basic thesis is that many social problems, if looked at through an entrepreneurial lens, create opportunity for someone to launch a venture that generates profits by alleviating that social problem.” (University of Pennsylvania).

To the degree that the competitively oriented programmes market themselves in a more collectivist tradition they do so by pointing to the relevance of innovation ecosystems and resources on and off campus. An example is the MBA programme in entrepreneurship at MIT Sloan School of Management: “MIT Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Introduces you to the broader MIT ecosystem and provides an overview of the abundant opportunities to collaborate across campus and gain help with your own ventures.” Still, the main objective in utilizing the ecosystem is to maximize economic outcomes of individually based ventures. Limited emphasis is placed on development and value creation in teams. Across the individualistic programmes, an ecosystem orientation seems to be the first step towards increasing the degree to which a programme takes a more holistic approach to the teaching and practice of entrepreneurship.

4.2 Moving Towards the Logic of the Collectivist – Collaborative

There were limited cues of a collectivist mindset in the studied programmes. Only a very small handful of universities were offering programmes that seemed to aim to balance the paradigms and really consider a more critical and reflective stance, for example the MSc programme in entrepreneurship at Aalto University: “Students, through individual and team-based activities, will explore both, the “bright” and “dark” sides to entrepreneurship, while carefully reflecting and building upon their own views and understanding towards entrepreneurship.” Thus, rather than aiming to build winners they take a more critical perspective to allow the more difficult dimensions of entrepreneurship to be visible and explicit.

We also find collectivistic and collaborative descriptions in the MSc programmes of Entrepreneurship at Twente University where they state that: “After completing this Master’s specialisation, you: use your knowledge and skills to help businesses impact society positively; integrate innovation and entrepreneurship with sustainability; manage (international) business and innovation processes from a holistic, ethically responsible and accountable perspective.” While Aalto nuances the optimistic view of entrepreneurship, Twente takes a more holistic perspective and aims to broaden the students’ perspective, which demands taking a more critical and ethical point of view.

At Harvard Business School the two categories seem merged, but the different courses have their own language and perspectives. In the mandatory case-based course “The Purpose of the Firm”: “a short module designed to explore how, and under what circumstances, private firms can help address some of society’s greatest challenges. Each of the five cases describes a set of leaders trying to “make a difference in the world” – that is, to harness the resources of the firm to tackle massive problems such as climate change, poverty, or economic development.” This can be read as more collectivistic, while other mandatory courses like the Strategy course in the same programme where particular attention is paid to competitive positioning.

University College London seems focused on a collaborative and collectivistic approaches: “most of the teaching is collaborative, experiential and driven by ‘build measure learn’ cycles where students act, analyse, and reflect on the effects caused by that action, and decide on the next action to take. Themes of sustainable capitalism are embedded into several of the modules of the programme, reflecting their desire to create for-profit businesses that can also benefit our wider society and respect the environment. (University College London).

While there are traces of collectivist collaborative paradigm, the traces that we find are scarce and scattered. Most programmes that integrate collaborative cues primarily pose them as subsidiary to the overarching theme of the competitive nature and individualistic orientation of the entrepreneurial mindsets.

5. Discussion

While past entrepreneurship theory has called for the need to consider a more collective orientation in entrepreneurship education (Johannisson, 2011; Chell, 2007), our findings across leading innovative universities globally suggest that the individualistic–competitive paradigm remains dominant. Although some programmes incorporate aspects of collaborative or collectivist approaches, these are often framed as secondary or supplemental, rather than as core logics driving programme design. This indicates that in practice, rather than a clash of paradigms, we may be witnessing the ascendancy of a single dominant logic.

This raises concerns given current calls for entrepreneurial education to support sustainability, inclusivity, and critical reflection—skills broadly recognised as essential for future-ready graduates (Bennett, Dunne, & Carré, 2000; OECD, 2018). If entrepreneurship education remains oriented toward competitive, individual-centred success measured through narrow economic outcomes, it risks neglecting the development of broader entrepreneurial capabilities necessary for addressing complex societal and environmental challenges (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Johannisson, 2011).

Our findings also complicate assumptions that cultural context directly determines paradigmatic orientation. Although Hofstede’s (2001) seminal work on cultural dimensions posits that Asian cultures are generally more collectivist and Western cultures more individualist, our analysis reveals that Asian institutions often replicate the same individualistic paradigms seen in the US and parts of Europe. This may suggest the influence of global institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), where universities conform to dominant models to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of international stakeholders. Such convergence could stem from a desire to climb international university rankings, which tend to prioritise entrepreneurial outcomes aligned with growth,

scalability, and innovation—metrics closely associated with the individualistic logic (Hazelkorn, 2015; Altbach, 2004).

The apparent mimicry of US pedagogical models—particularly among top Asian institutions—raises questions about cultural contagion and the uncritical adoption of dominant educational frameworks. Altbach (2004) argues, globalisation of higher education often leads to the imposition of Western norms, particularly American ones, which may not fully align with indigenous cultural values or societal needs. Unintentionally exporting a culturally specific definition of entrepreneurial success that undervalues collaborative, community-oriented, or mission-driven forms of entrepreneurship more commonly aligned with collectivist traditions (Hayton, George, & Zahra, 2002).

While a handful of programmes (e.g., Aalto, Twente, and UCL) demonstrate a more balanced or critically reflective orientation, these remain the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, within many programmes, collectivist elements are either isolated to specific modules or subsumed under broader individualistic goals. This fragmented incorporation of alternative logics can lead to internal contradictions within curricula, potentially confusing students and undermining the development of coherent entrepreneurial identities (Blenker et al., 2012; Rideout & Gray, 2013). For educators and academic programme developers it might be useful to emphasize holistic, ethically responsible and accountable perspectives using the SDGs actively throughout programmes rather than in individual goals when designing or redesigning education, to make sure the same logic is applied.

Ultimately, our findings highlight the need for more critical engagement with the pedagogical paradigms that underlie entrepreneurship education. When educators are unaware of the paradigms they are reproducing, they risk perpetuating narrow, exclusionary conceptions of entrepreneurship and overlooking the pedagogical potential of more inclusive, community-oriented, and reflective approaches. We encourage entrepreneurship educators to reflect on their own assumptions and consider how their teaching can support the development of entrepreneurs who are economically effective and also socially and environmentally responsive.

6. Conclusion

We provide a framework scholars can use in the review or design of entrepreneurship programmes that can address the underlying assumptions and values that entrepreneurship programmes are based on. In reviewing their own programmes, they can more explicitly consider whether the hidden paradigms reflect their own values and world views.

It would be interesting to revisit the data in five years' time to see if we would find more or less of the two extremes of this orientation scale or will there be a trend of moving towards one or the other? Also: Will we see a change in the positions of the orientations on the rankings over time?

In summary it seems the individualistic paradigm is the current 'winner' in terms of valued logics exhibited by top ranking Universities. Our aim for this paper was to highlight what might be hidden for many, and to open a discussion around what are the commonly shared paradigms underpinning entrepreneurship and are they being taught coherently in study programmes at the university level.

Ethics and AI Declaration

Ethical clearance for this research was not required; hence a clearance statement is not included. AI (GPT-4) was used selectively to support theory development, improve academic phrasing, and identify relevant literature. References suggested through the tool were independently verified for accuracy and peer-reviewed status. The AI was used as a supplementary aid, the authors maintaining full responsibility for all analytical interpretations, literature selections, and final composition decisions.

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